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**LAYING A FOUNDATION
OF EXCELLENCE IN
ACADEMICS & CHARACTER**



Great Expectations

When talent meets opportunity, great things can happen.

At Cornerstone Schools we expect the best of our students and teach them to develop the best in themselves. Our mission is to give the inner city children of Birmingham a quality educational foundation to help them build a better life, regardless of their ability to pay, their faith, their ethnicity or their gender.

So many of today's urban public schools are failing to prepare children to live up to their full potential. Too often poor academic performance, or becoming parents before they have a chance to be children, leads students to give up on their education. Dropping out leaves them trapped in a cycle of poverty, at risk from gang violence, drugs and crime.



There had to be a better alternative. In 1984 El Shaddai (God Almighty in Hebrew) Ministries was founded by the Reverends Lula and Jim Merritt as an after-school program. It grew to become El Shaddai Academy, the first campus of Cornerstone Schools of Alabama. Since full time classes began in 1993, El Shaddai Academy has continued to develop as a model school offering academic excellence in an ecumenical Christian setting.

We're now working toward accreditation from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

In addition to a sound understanding of the basics, Cornerstone teaches students how to learn and think for themselves. We nurture their love for learning and help them develop sound Christian values that will guide them through the rest of their lives.



Curriculum And Character

With an outstanding curriculum, Cornerstone offers kindergarten for children age four and five, and classes for students from the first through the fifth grade. We are in the process of adding classes and hope to soon be educating students through the eighth grade.

Our teachers are more than

teachers. They are mentors and role models who know how to spark the interest of students and build their enthusiasm for learning new things.

Through personal visits, conferences and correspondence, parents and teachers work closely for the development of the child. Tutoring is available to help students succeed to the best of their abilities, and a broad

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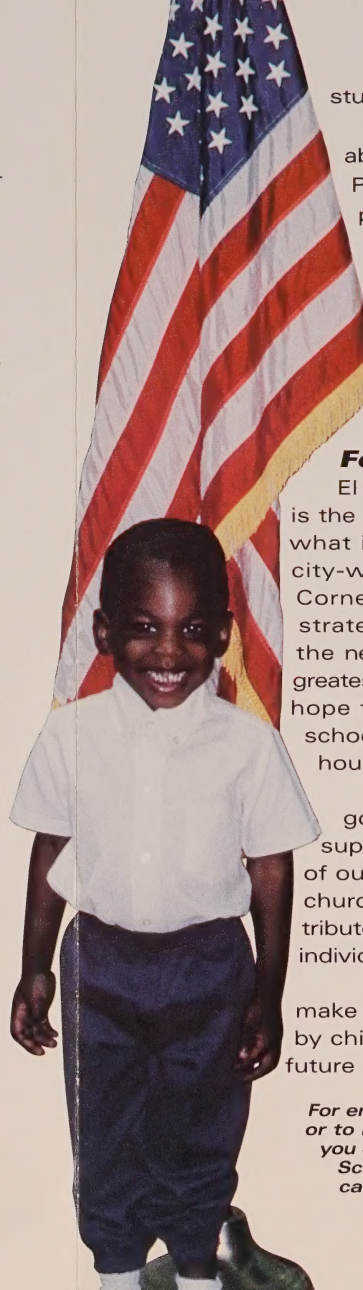
Teaching the lessons of character day by day, Cornerstone helps students build good work habits so they can experience the positive satisfactions of achievement. They learn the value of the simple virtues in life as they build self esteem and regard for others.



A Partnership In Excellence.

Our Partnership Program is about opportunity. It gives children who are most at risk academically and socially an opportunity for a quality education—while giving people who care an opportunity to truly make a difference in a child's life.

To help pay educational expenses, partners contribute \$2500 for each child they sponsor. They also become mentors and role models, attending up to four Partner's Day programs at the school with their



students during the year.

To learn more about our Partnership Program, tutoring program and other opportunities to help children build a better future, please contact Dr. Vernard T. Gant at 591-7600 .

A Vision For the Future

El Shaddai Academy is the first campus of what is envisioned as a city-wide network of Cornerstone Schools strategically located in the neighborhoods of greatest need. Ideally, we hope to soon have a school near each public housing community.

To accomplish this goal, we will need the support and generosity of our communities and churches, corporate contributors and concerned individuals.

Together, we can make a difference, child by child, and build a better future for Birmingham.

For enrollment information or to learn more about how you can help Cornerstone Schools help children, call 591-7600 today.

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Copy, THANKS so much for your support. Here is a copy for you. Maybe it will clarify some of what I said.

Dear Friends,

Ken

There has been much interest concerning the resolutions passed at the North Alabama Conference of the United Methodist Church dealing with gay and lesbian people. However, this voice is not the only voice within the religious community nor the United Methodist Church concerning homosexual people. The following is my response to the Latham UMC resolution, the resolution that the North Alabama Conference passed, concerning the position of the church on homosexuality within the UM Discipline, and the issue of banning same-sex Holy Union services in the life of the church. This was debated Wednesday, June 10th, in the 1998 North Alabama Annual Conference.

I would like to speak against the resolution, and in support of hospitality and inclusiveness to gay and lesbian persons. I believe that the church is in error in its teaching about homosexual people. I believe that homosexual people, and their relationships should be honored as a precious part of God's good creation.

My belief about gay and lesbian people has been formed out of the unique opportunity I had to be a member of the United Methodist Committee to Study Homosexuality during the 1988-1992 Quadrennium. Myself and 27 other people from across the church were elected from the General Council on Ministries. For four years our committee was in dialogue with those in the church, and with persons at the very top of their fields in theology, ethics, biblical Studies, biology, psychology & sociology. We drafted a document that was presented to General Conference. Yet, because what we said was not what the General Conference wanted to hear, the report was voted down. However, the integrity and validity of our study remains.

What our committee found is this:

The overwhelming evidence from the vast majority of research in every discipline is that gay and lesbian sexual orientation is not a choice, it is not a "lifestyle" chosen, rather it is the way that gay and lesbian people are created to be. Sexual orientation, both homosexual and heterosexual, is set extremely early, and is very difficult, if not virtually impossible to change. It would be just as hard for a heterosexual to change into being a homosexual, as it would for a homosexual to change into being a heterosexual.

The scientific data shows that gay and lesbian people are no more likely than heterosexual people to be prone to mental illness, criminal behavior, or commit sexual abuse. The American Psychological Association does not list homosexuality as a mental illness. Their consensus is that homosexuality is no more or less healthy than heterosexuality.

I believe that our "heterosexual world" (the majority of us) has created a distorted stereotype of gay and lesbian people, such as the "drag queen," or of rampant promiscuity, which is false, and blinds us to the truth of who gay and lesbian people really are. Gay and lesbian people are really just like us. The overwhelming majority of them lead quiet, normal lives. They are in our churches, our schools, our homes.

Yet, gay and lesbian people become imprisoned by fear, beaten down into hiding from friends and family and church members who have been taught by our church to judge them, who shame them for being who they are created to be. We, as a church, are wrong in how we judge these people. We should not call sinful those faithful Christians who are living in faithful relationships with integrity, with the gifts of the Spirit, living the life they were created to live. We should affirm their relationships. As a church, we should bless their covenants of life-long faithfulness, and give them loving support.

This discussion hinges upon the interpretation of the Bible.

Homosexual acts are mentioned in few places in the New Testament (*Rom. 1:26; 1 Cor. 6:9; 1 Tim 1:10*). Never is it a major topic of discussion. These few verses about homosexual acts should be placed along side those terrible verses that affirm the institution of slavery (*Eph. 6:5; Col. 3:22; Tit. 2:9; 1 Pet. 2:18*), and those wrongful verses that reject the authority of women in the church and home (*1 Cor. 14:34; Eph. 5:22; Col. 3:18; 1 Tim. 2:11; 1 Pet. 3:1*). These verses, all of the above, are evidence of ancient prejudice that was written into the Bible. These verses are all found in the Epistles; I believe they do not reflect the teachings of Jesus Christ found in the Gospels; and, they should not be interpreted as the will of God for our lives today.

Marge - you might want this man as a speaker!
John M.

For me, the word of Biblical truth is how Jesus embraced the abused and the outcast, the ones the religious authorities said were "unclean," and loved them, told them they were children of God, and called them to faithful discipleship.

This is a justice issue. The witness of Jesus is that all people should be treated and honored as God's beloved, without distinction, with justice, mercy, and grace.

My great concern is for the many people who are hurting. There have been faithful, gifted gay and lesbian Christians in every church I have worked in, or served as pastor, who have been wounded by the church.

Gay and lesbian people are here today in this conference, having to hide themselves because they have been shamed by their church. There are parents of gay and lesbian people here today, who shame themselves, who have been shamed by the church, being made to think they raised their children wrong.

This is tragic... and the church bears fault in this.

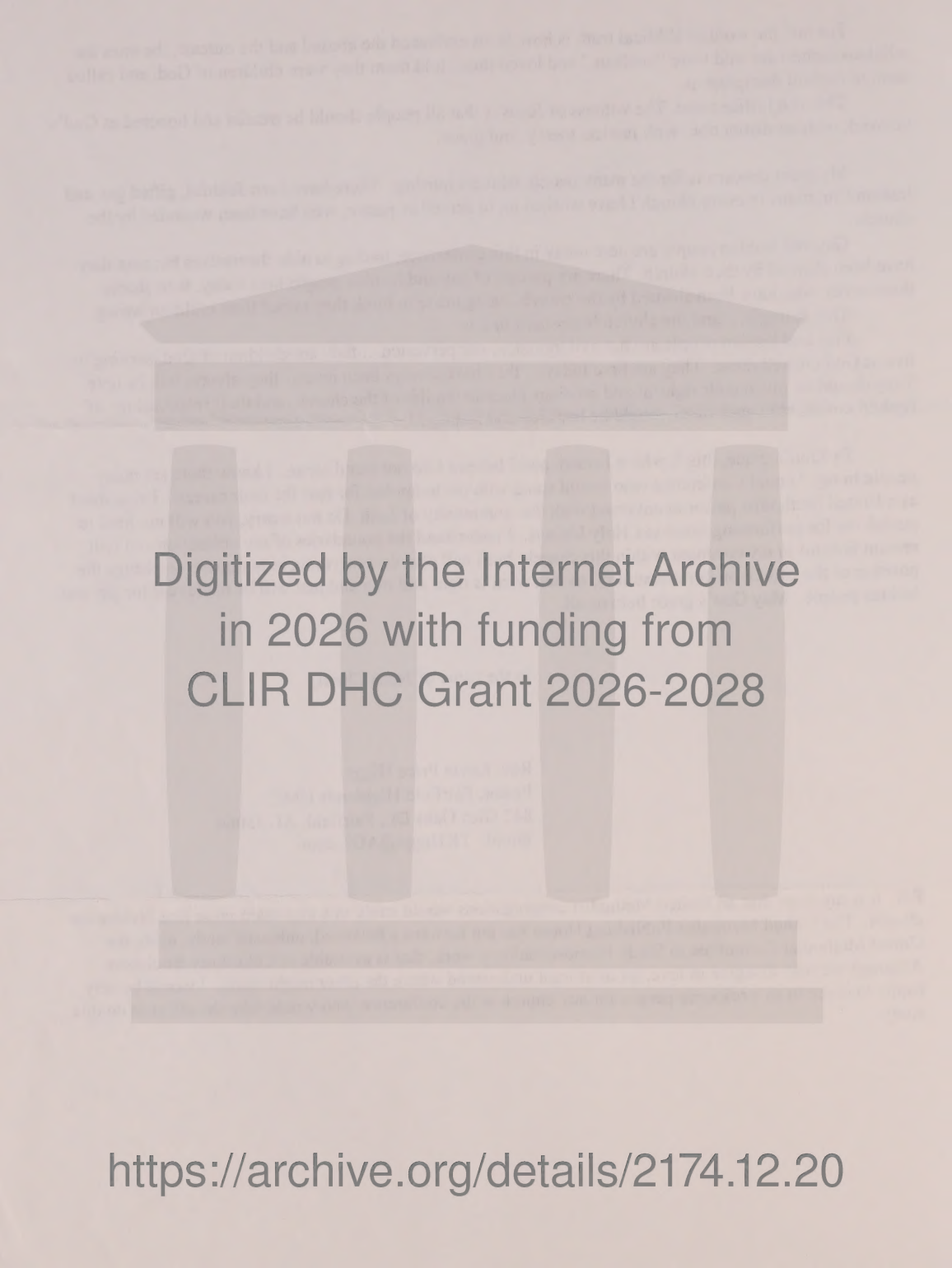
Gay and lesbian people are not evil, nor sick, nor perverted... they are children of God, seeking to live as God created them. They are here today... they have always been here... they always will be here. They should be given their rightful and precious place in the life of the church; and their relationships of faithful covenant to each other should be honored and respected.

By God's grace, this is where I stand, and I believe I do not stand alone. I know there are many people in my Annual Conference who would stand with me today but for fear for their career. I also stand as a United Methodist pastor in covenant with this community of faith. Do not worry, you will not have to punish me for performing same-sex Holy Unions. I understand the boundaries of my ordination and will remain faithful in my covenant within this church; but I will also do everything in my power to change the position of the church on homosexuality, so that what is right and true and just will be made real for gay and lesbian people. May God's grace help us all.

In the name of Jesus Christ,

Rev. Kevin Price Higgs
Pastor, Fairfield Highlands UMC
842 Glen Oaks Dr., Fairfield, AL 35064
Email: TKHiggs@AOL.com

P.S. It is my hope that all United Methodist congregations would study this important issue that divides our church. The United Methodist Publishing House has put forward a balanced, unbiased study, using the United Methodist Committee to Study Homosexuality's work, that is available at Cokesbury Bookstore. Although we may disagree in love, let us at least understand where the other might stand. I would be very happy to come in as a resource person for any church in the conference who would take the effort to do this study.



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HOMOSEXUALITY & UNITED METHODISTS

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Gay Rights Family May Lose Cottage

.c The Associated Press

By EVELYNE GIRARDET

CHICAGO (AP) - The Graham family believes strongly in the Methodist Church and civil rights, including the rights of gays and lesbians to live free of discrimination.

Their beliefs have earned them an eviction notice from a cottage they have at a Methodist campground in suburban Chicago.

The notice came after Bill and Nannette Graham's 16-year-old daughter, Amelia, posted signs in the cottage's windows supporting gay friends the Chicago family claims were being discriminated against by the campground.

Her move angered trustees at the Historic United Methodist Campground, who told the Grahams to be out by Monday and threatened to change their cottage's locks.

Chicago-area Methodist leaders say they will investigate the dispute. Meanwhile, the Grahams aren't budging.

"This is a bigger issue than gay or lesbian rights to us," Mrs. Graham said

Friday. "We would have taken a stand for anyone's civil rights."

Mrs. Graham said the dispute started last summer when two men rented one of the 100 cottages on the campground, located in suburban Des Plaines. The family has owned a cottage there for five years.

After rumors surfaced that the men were homosexual, camp residents held a prayer vigil in front of their cottage and chanted scripture against homosexuality, she said. At the end of the summer, the men were told by camp trustees that they would not be allowed to rent there again.

The Grahams then sent a letter to the Chicago District Campground Association board, which runs the camp, informing them that the two men would be their house guests.

That prompted the board to say such an invitation would violate camp rules. Amelia responded with her posters.

One read: "Gays and lesbians, bisexuals and transgenders, welcome." The other called the Graham home a "reconciling" cottage, referring to Methodists who support the inclusion of homosexuals in the church.

Two weeks ago, the Grahams received a letter from the board informing them that they were being evicted for violating their "privilege of ownership of a cottage."

"The sign displayed in your cottage windows incites conflict and inhibits harmonious environment of the campground," the letter said.

Messages left at the campground offices were not returned Friday.

Bishop Joseph Sprague, leader of the 142,000 Methodists in Northern Illinois, said Friday the church will investigate the dispute.

"While United Methodism - for theological reasons - has determined that clergy may not celebrate services of holy union for gays and lesbians, at the same time, the church is very clear in its advocacy of the sacred worth and civil rights of gay and lesbian people," Sprague said.

Mrs. Graham said she hopes the United Methodist Church will take a stand.

"I want them to say: 'This is wrong, shape up,'" she said. "I don't want them to tie it up in a bag and throw it away."

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MCCCK@kornet.org, w Lindsey@mindspring.com,

jadodson@mylink.net (Macon),

MCCGreenville@juno.com (Donna Stroud), jamie@bluenet.net,

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MCCBUDDOG@aol.com, SafeHMCC@aol.com, Revdlc@aol.com,

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PTBEARS@juno.com (Susan Lowe), ramorgan@surfsouth.com (Randy M),

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covmcc@aol.com (covenant MCC), RevChipC@aol.com, RevGTS@aol.com,

amaspirit@msn.com, RevHHL5@aol.com, revem.bel@mc2000.com,

MCCSavGa@aol.com, AJWoodard.SC@worldnet.att.net (Jo Woodard),

72202.3460@compuserve.com (Richard Smith),

RevAJM@aol.com (Amanda), KMozingo@aol.com,

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Beverly, forward to all churches

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Subject: Methodists Act Against Homosexual Unions/Pastors can be defrocked

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August 12, 1998

Methodists Act Against Homosexual Unions

By GUSTAV NIEBUHR

The United Methodist Church's highest court ruled Tuesday that ministers

who conduct same-sex unions violate the denomination's law and can be tried in its courts.

The ruling, by the church's Judicial Council, declared that a sentence added to the Methodists' rule book two years ago that barred ministers from conducting gay unions was not advisory but binding on clerics.

Methodist ministers convicted of disobeying church law can face penalties

as severe as suspension from office and expulsion from the denomination.

The council's decision is the second in a week in which a major religious

body has dealt a blow to wider acceptance of homosexuals in church circles. Last Wednesday the world's Anglican bishops, meeting in Canterbury, England, passed a resolution declaring homosexual activity "incompatible with Scripture" and advising Anglicanism's 37 church provinces, which include the Episcopal Church in the United States, against ordaining homosexuals as priests.

The United Methodist Church, with 8.5 million members, is second in size

only to the Southern Baptist Convention among America's Protestant denominations. Last week the nine judges of its Judicial Council — five

lay people and four ministers — met in Dallas and heard arguments

arising from the trial last March of the Rev. Jimmy Creech. Creech was narrowly acquitted by a church jury in Nebraska of charges that he had violated the denomination's rule book, the Book of Discipline, in performing a ceremony of union for two women in his Omaha congregation.

The verdict touched off an uproar among conservatives and led several of the church's regional jurisdictions to ask the Judicial Council for a ruling.

Creech's defense had rested on the argument that a sentence inserted in the rule book in 1996 by the denomination's General Conference, its top

legislative body, was only advisory. As evidence, he noted that the sentence had been added not to the part of the book that deals with the

church's structure and specific regulations but instead to the social principles section, a collection of the church's reflections on social issues ranging from racism to the environment to the use of tobacco.

The sentence says, "Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches."

In its ruling Tuesday, the Judicial Council said the sentence "has the effect of church law, notwithstanding its placement." The ruling added that "conduct in violation of this prohibition renders a pastor liable to

a charge of disobedience."

Bishop Bruce Blake of Oklahoma City, one of two bishops who had argued before the council for interpreting the sentence as binding, said of the

decision, "Now we have clarity, and we know what the law of the church is."

Bishop Blake, who had been among those requesting a ruling, said he did

not think it would end debate within the church over issues related to homosexuality. But, he said, he expects it to ease "uncertainty and lack

of trust" among Methodists stemming from disagreement over what the General Conference intended.

But Creech, reached by telephone on Ocracoke Island, N.C., where he has been working part time since his bishop in Nebraska removed him from his

pulpit, said the decision would throw the social principles section of the rule book into confusion, by raising the question whether other social stands can result in charges against a minister. He said he would

join efforts to reverse the ruling at the next General Conference, in 2000.

Mike McClellan, an Omaha lawyer who represented Creech during his trial

and at the hearing, said he did not think the ruling would stop some ministers from blessing same-sex unions.

"It's just not that easy to prosecute people" in the church, he said

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Methodists Tighten Ban On Gay Unions
Pastors can be defrocked for performing ceremony
Don Lattin, Chronicle Religion Writer Wednesday, August 12, 1998

Northern California's divisive battle over gay rights in the Methodist church is expected to intensify after a ruling yesterday that pastors in

the nation's second-largest Protestant church may be tried and defrocked

for performing ``ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions.''

The decision by the highest court of the United Methodist Church was a major setback for liberal clergy and others asking for greater legitimacy

for gay marriage.

In the ruling issued in Dallas, the Judicial Council of the 8.5-million-member denomination said pastors can be tried under a 1996 resolution prohibiting gay marriage that was adopted by national church

delegates and added to the Social Principles of the church.

``Conduct in violation of this prohibition renders a pastor liable to a

charge of disobedience to the order and discipline of the United Methodist Church,''

the nine-member court ruled. Yesterday's decision puts Northern California Methodist Bishop Melvin Talbert between a theological rock and an ecclesiastical hard place.

Ten Methodist ministers — including the popular and powerful leader of

Glide Memorial United Methodist Church in San Francisco, the Rev. Cecil

Williams — are among 150 Christian, Jewish and Buddhist clergy in Northern California who have signed a declaration stating, ``I have officiated or would be willing to officiate at the religious marriage of

a same- gender couple.''

PROBLEM OF CHURCH LAW

Before yesterday's ruling, Talbert declined to discipline any Methodist

clergy who performed gay rites, arguing that ``performing a holy union does not violate the law of the church, even though such an act does go

against the spirit of the Social Principles.''

When he made that statement in May, Talbert said he could continue to allow same-sex unions ``until instructed otherwise by our Judicial

Council."

Talbert, who was reached last night while on vacation in Arizona, said he was "deeply saddened" by the ruling.

"But as a bishop of the church, I will abide by the discipline and action of the Judicial Council," said Talbert, the immediate past president of the National Council of Churches, the nation's major ecumenical organization.

The bishop said no disciplinary action will be taken against pastors who have performed same-sex ceremonies in the past, but he said, "Now that the law has been clarified, we have to hold people accountable."

He said he would not take action against pastors for signing petitions stating their continued support for same-sex ceremonies. Church law "doesn't say anything about signing statements," he said. "It's about performing a same-sex union."

Talbert said he was hoping for a different outcome in Dallas. "This is not the first time I have found myself in disagreement with the church," he said.

Talbert's support of gay rights has caused a revolt by a coalition of conservative evangelical clergy in Northern California, the Evangelical

Renewal Fellowship. Some have left the denomination, taking entire congregations with them, and are now negotiating over the real estate left behind. Others are withholding funds from the denomination or threatening other action.

The Rev. John Christie, president of the Evangelical Renewal Fellowship and pastor of Mission City United Methodist Church in Santa Clara, said his coalition feels vindicated by the court ruling and will wait to see whether Talbert actually enforces it.

"The ball is now in Bishop Talbert's court," said Christie. "Bishop Talbert needs to get back in line and be held accountable."

'SAD NEWS'

The Rev. Alan Jones, executive director of the United Methodist Mission in San Francisco, called yesterday's ruling "sad news."

"Those clergy who support holy union will continue to do them," Jones said. "For me, it's a pastoral issue. Either I respect the integrity of my sisters and brothers, or I don't. I don't believe in 'love the sinner, hate the sin.' I either love someone, or I don't."

OMAHA | ESRIAN COUPL E

Yesterday's ruling by the Methodist version of the Supreme Court was on an appeal by conservative bishops upset over the acquittal earlier this

year of a Nebraska pastor, the Rev. Jimmy Creech, who had been charged with violating church law by performing a holy union for two lesbians in

Omaha.

Thomas McAnally, spokesman at the United Methodist Church headquarters in

Nashville, said local bishops like Talbert "don't have the authority to

overrule this decision."

"This is the Supreme Court," he said. "The decision is final."

McAnally said any member of the church could begin judicial proceedings

against a pastor or bishop for violating church law.

"It would go to trial just like the Nebraska trial, which probably would

have gone differently if they had this ruling in front of them," he said.

Williams, the pastor at Glide church in San Francisco, said yesterday that he wants to read the ruling and talk to his lawyer before commenting

on the court action.

Other Methodist ministers who signed the interfaith declaration supporting same-sex marriage include the Revs. Karen Oliveto, Stephen Lee, Ronald Swisher, John Chamberlin, Gary Barbaree, Kelvin Sauls, Charlie Lerrigo, Paul Sweet and Phillip Lawson.

The gay rights group that circulated the declaration, the All Our Families Coalition, plans to hold a worship service in support of same-sex marriage at 7 p.m. on September 15 at the First Unitarian Universalist Church of San Francisco, at the corner of Geary Boulevard and Franklin Street.

"Clergy are making public stands because of their conscience," said Cheryl Deaner, executive director of the coalition. "That's a higher authority than the church hierarchy."

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ON THE GATE

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